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ABSTRACT

Two six-year old kindergartners from different classrooms were able to write books because their instructors recognized their enthusiasm and provided extra time. The first student, frustrated at not being able to finish rewriting "Cinderella" during the limited writing periods of the classroom, was allowed to finish the story over a period of three weeks, writing before school and during the class time used for alphabet and phonics skills. She was given the correct spelling of words when she asked for them, but was also permitted to use invented spellings. The second student wrote both at home and during lunch and recess at school to create a collection of 10 one-page stories in two weeks. The stories used fewer invented spellings and were illustrated. Both children became more involved in their writing because time was set aside for them to work on longer projects, and they received encouragement from family members. That their books were preserved also served as a reward. Their enthusiasm was beneficial to the other students in the class. (HTH)

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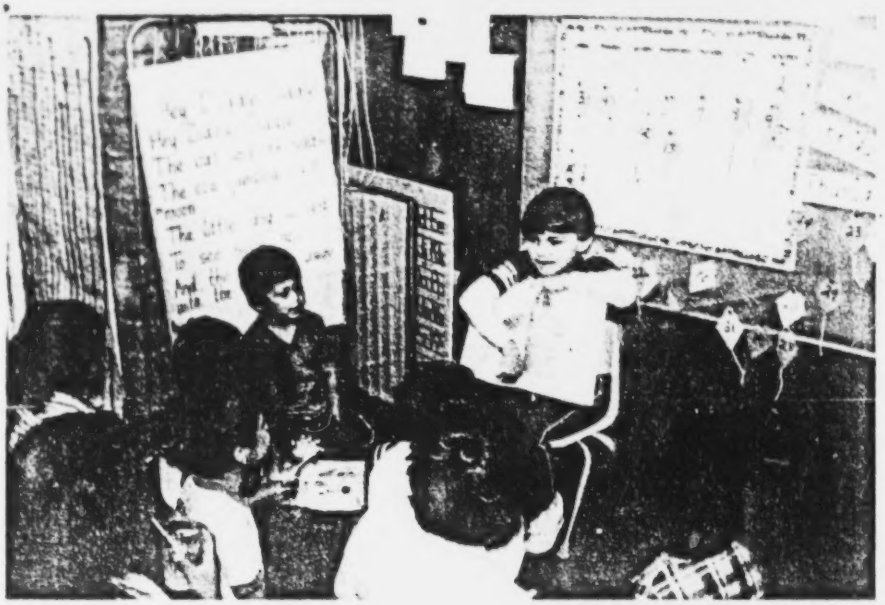

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Cinderella, The Army, and an Element of Time

by Susan E. M. Hall

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Cinderella, The Army, and an Element of Time

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Writing is a difficult task for young children who have only recently acquired the fine motor and hand/eye coordination skills to apply pencil to paper in a legible manner. The new acquisition of these skills requires time to develop. Consequently, humane teachers require or ask for writing in small time segments and expect short manuscripts. For the majority of children this is the preferred and acceptable approach to the task. However, if this is the only expectation for writing in the classroom, a small segment of young children will have their needs overlooked. These are the children who show amazing perseverance and enthusiasm for writing. Generally they have the same physical limitations as other children, tiring easily, but they have the desire and ability to continue a single line of thought or a single task at great length. These children need to be provided with time and encouragement to continue the writing they have in mind until it is completed to their satisfaction. Two young writers with exceptional enthusiasm for writing are examined more closely in this paper.

Both Yvette and Jenny were six-year-old kindergartners at the time these "books" were written. Although they were in different classrooms, both had been taught the basic fundamentals of invented spelling. Each found great satisfaction in her ability to write and each was extremely enthusiastic about the task. Not only did they do a great deal of writing on their own time, but they both helped and encouraged other children in the classroom to write as well. Their enthusiasm for writing was acknowledged by the teacher and additional time for writing was provided to them.

Jenny set herself a writing task based on completion of a single story. Her goal was to rewrite the story of Cinderella into her own book. She was fascinated by the story of Cinderella, perhaps because she had stepsisters of her own. Twice, Jenny began to write the story of Cinderella during activities that had a limited time duration and she was extremely disappointed when she was unable to complete it. Viewing this disappointment as possibly discouraging to Jenny as a writer, the teacher discussed with her her desire to rewrite the entire story. It was clear to Jenny that the task would take a long time, but she was willing to spend that time. The teacher then provided her with a stack of papers that were all the same size and a place to keep her pages until the book was completed. The story which follows (reprinted with Jenny's original spelling, but punctuation inserted by the author of this paper) is the result of three weeks' work.

Cinderella by Jenny

Oasa patim thear woz a grl nand Cinderella. She lived with her stap mom and her stap sistrs. One da a latr cam in the mal. It woz a latr to go to the bal. Cinderella said, "Kan I go?"

"No, b kas you will b to busy giteg us ready."

Cinderella woz all a lon. A vos said, "Hello, Cinderella."

Cinderella said, "Hoo r you?"

"I m your fre godmother." Cinderella woz srpized. "You will go to the bal if you beg m a papkn and 4 mics." So she did.

She waved her wand, "Bibt, babt, boo." The papkn tured in to a beautiful coch. She waved her wand, "Bibt, babt, boo." She trnd the mice into 4 wit horses. She said, "Git in, mi dir."

"What abat mi jas?"

"O, mi, I omost frgat." "Bibt, babt, boo" her rags trnd in to a beautiful jas. "Hop in mi dir."

Cinderella woz at the ball. Cinderella danst all nit.

The palis clac ragg. Cinderella ran down the stars. The machic ended right at the batam of the stars. Cinderella woz back in her rags. Cinderella ran hom.

The prns tod the fatsman to find the grl that fits the sipr. The fats man wit to avre has in the kigdam. Fanle he kam to Cinderellas has. Frst her stap sists trid it an. The first stap sists trid an the sipr. It dit fit her. Then the atr sister trid it on. It dit fit her ether.

Cinderella ran dan the stars. Her stap mom sad, "She is onle a mad."

"I dot car. The prns said avre grl mast tri the sipr on."

It fit Cinderella. Cinderella mardd the prns. They livd hple ovr ofdr.

The End

More time for writing was created by Jenny's own scheduling of her writing and by the teacher excusing her from some classroom activities. Because both her parents worked, Jenny was often dropped off at school early. She took advantage of this time by appearing at the classroom door and asking if she could work on her story before school started. The teacher agreed, and Jenny wrote for five to twenty minutes nearly every morning. Some mornings she wrote entirely by herself and other mornings she asked the teacher for assistance. The assistance she often desired concerned correct spelling for words such as "beautiful." When she asked for correct spellings, they were provided to her. Occasionally they were provided orally, but more often they were written in a dictionary created for this purpose.

Jenny's second grade brother provided additional incentive for her writing. He was amazed that she was writing, stating he had never learned to write in kindergarten. He was even more amazed by the fact that her teacher was not concerned about misspelled words. It quickly became clear that he was extremely pleased with his sister's ability to write. After some discussion with the teacher, he agreed that Jenny was very special because she could write and that she would eventually learn how to spell all the words correctly. He came to the classroom with her a couple of mornings every week to see how her book was progressing. When the book was completed, Jenny wanted to run down the hall and show it to him immediately.

Other small blocks of classroom time were provided for Jenny. She was part of a small group of children in her class who were writing independently. It was not necessary to require this group to participate

in activities designed to teach the alphabet and phonics skills. As a result, these children were provided writing time while the teacher worked with the rest of the class. Jenny used this time to continue writing Cinderella. She also used this time to encourage other children to rewrite their favorite fairy tales.

Yvette selected a different approach for the writing of her book. Unlike Jenny, Yvette was initially approached by the teacher regarding the possibility of writing several stories. Yvette had decided she needed homework. She had also suddenly blossomed in the classroom as an enthusiastic writer, writing on all sorts of scraps of paper. The teacher offered her a stack of paper all cut the same size and suggested that if she wanted homework perhaps she would like to try writing stories for a book. This was exactly what Yvette had in mind. Part of the stories for her book were written at home and others were written in the classroom.

What Yvette created over the next two weeks was a collection of 10 one-page stories, each accompanied by a picture. Yvette was writing with a time line she set herself. The object was to finish her book before her father returned from National Guard Camp. Her plan was to present him with the completed book the evening he returned. Several of the stories dealt with her father being gone, including the story which follows. (The punctuation was inserted by this author.)

My Daddy by Yvette

My daddy he went to the Army on the 30 of April and he going to come back on the 13 of May and I'm going to tell him it its May the 13 and you laef the 30.

Other stories dealt with happenings in the classroom such as the anticipated visit by the teacher's ferret. (Punctuation inserted by this author.)

Teacher Ferret by Yvette

Teacher has a ferret. Teacher Chris is going to bringing teacher ferret on Friday the 13.

The Ead

Other stories reflected her reading of books or were dependent upon the picture she drew. The following story may be a poem and accompanied a picture of a single bird with an inch worm crawling on the top of its beak.

Inch-By-Inch by Yvette

Inch-by-inch
Inch-by-inch
Inch-by-inch

The End

When Yvette had completed the stories, she asked the teacher for help in numbering the pages and in writing a table of contents. The table of contents reflected the time line she had previously created. It was bordered with pictures of army men.

Yvette created most of her own writing time because she began the book at the end of a school year which had become overcrowded with field trips and evaluation time. Besides writing at home, she decided that the lunch recess was an appropriate time to write. She asked permission to stay in the classroom after lunch to write and her teacher had granted permission. Yvette, however, quickly decided it was "boring and lonely" inside by herself so she brought her paper and

pencil outside. For most of a week she spent part of the lunch recess writing while stretched out on her stomach on a corner of a basketball court with a rock holding her paper down against the wind. In a manner similar to Jenny, Yvette also used part of her self-selection classroom time to write. While she wrote, she also helped and encouraged her classmates to write.

While Jenny had her brother in the classroom to encourage her, Yvette had her entire family. All of them were very impressed with her efforts and continued to encourage her. She was fortunate to have a family which allowed her to write, but did not push her beyond her own limits of time and ideas. Needless to say, her father was extremely impressed with the book when it was given to him.

When she began her book, Yvette had far more information about the standard spelling of words than Jenny had when she wrote Cinderella. The very few spellings she asked for were nearly always provided to her orally. Her mother and her teacher shared information about Yvette's writing habits, and her techniques proved to be very similar at home and at school. She refused to share any of her stories until both the story and the picture were completed. When she wanted a word spelled, she left her writing, obtained the desired spelling, then returned to her writing. When both story and picture were completed, she took great pride in sharing them.

In part, Jenny and Yvette became more involved in writing because time was set aside for them to work on longer projects. Providing time for both children to continue a long project also had positive effects on the writing efforts of other children in their classrooms. When Jenny began her book, many children in her classroom were writing well, but it had not occurred to any of them to write more than one page or to continue a single project more than one day. Jenny demonstrated that this could be done, and several children followed her example and wrote "books" of three to five pages over a period of two or three days. When Yvette began her book, only a few children in her class were writing well. Yvette's continuing efforts caused several children to attempt the writing task and the children who were writing followed her example by writing "books" of collected stories.

It would also appear important to provide children who have the perseverance and enthusiasm to write more than just additional time. When children have put this kind of time and effort into a task, their writing should also be properly preserved as a reward. Both of these children had their books laminated and bound by the teacher. The completed books were then "real" books to be shared with family and friends. These particular books were also bound in two copies. The originals belonged to Jenny and Yvette and the copies belonged to the classroom. In this way, the entire class could share the accomplishments and read the books.

Jenny and Yvette both took great pride in sharing their books with the other children in the class. Initially neither of them wanted to read the books aloud; however, when the teacher began reading their books to the class and when they realized the books were being well accepted by the other children, Jenny and Yvette both decided to read aloud. They readily answered questions about how the books had been written and bound.

Both Jenny and Yvette provided invaluable assistance to other children who used the books as models for their own writing attempts.

Time is an important element for beginning young writers. It is extremely difficult to improve any skill without time to practice. However, the time to practice needs to be tailored to the needs of individual children. Those who desire to continue work on long projects deserve to be recognized and encouraged in their efforts. Providing these enthusiastic young writers, Jenny and Yvette, with time to continue a project had positive effects not only on their individual self-confidence as writers, but also on the other children in their classrooms as well. Providing time and encouragement to children who can set their own goals is one response to the needs of children as individual writers in the classroom.

Susan E. M. Hall is currently a part-time lecturer in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wyoming. She previously taught kindergarten in Albuquerque, New Mexico and Laramie, Wyoming.

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